DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 348 154 PS 020 697

AUTHOR Maddaus, John
TITLE The Problem of "Location" in Parental Choice of School.
PUB DATE Apr 90
NOTE 41p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Boston, MA, April 16-20, 1990).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Catholic Schools; Educational Policy; Elementary Education; Enrollment; Moral Development; *Moral Values; Neighborhoods; Neighborhood Schools; *Parent Attitudes; Parents; Private Schools; *Public Schools; *School Choice; *School Location
IDENTIFIERS *New York (Syracuse); Syracuse City Schools NY

ABSTRACT

This paper reports the results of a study of parents' reasons for choosing a school for their children. Earlier studies produced inconsistent results concerning the importance of school location for parents' choice. The present study involved interviews with parents of elementary school children in 39 families living in 5 neighborhoods in Syracuse, New York. Children were enrolled in public, Catholic, or non-Catholic private schools. The neighborhoods were predominantly white and represented a wide range of income levels. In about 75 percent of the families, at least one parent was Catholic and had a grandparent who had come to the United States from a European country. With respect to their children's school enrollment, parents adopted one of four strategies: (1) living in a neighborhood with good schools; (2) selecting a neighborhood Catholic school; (3) selecting a school in another neighborhood; and (4) selecting a neighborhood public school. The overriding factor mentioned by parents as influencing choice of school was not cognitive learning but the acquisition of moral values. School location was perceived as having an impact on the educational outcomes parents valued for their children. The implications of these results for educational policy are examined. A 29-item bibliography is provided. (BC)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED348154

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

The Problem of "Location" in Parental Choice of School

by

John Maddaus

College of Education
104 Shibles Hall
University of Maine
Orono, ME 04469

prepared for presentation at
the 1990 annual meeting of the
American Educational Research Association
Boston, MA
April, 1990

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

John Maddaus

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

PS 020697

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Abstract

Advocates of parental choice of school argue that, given the opportunity, parents would choose higher quality schools and thus put pressure on all schools to improve. But the Alum Rock study concluded that "location", rather than school quality, is the primary criterion for parents. This study concludes that parents give precedence to the moral development of their children, and view schools as a part of the total neighborhood context in promoting moral values. Theories and program concepts which recognize the importance of community life and moral development should be reflected in programs which empower whole communities (parents, teachers and others) to pursue collaborative efforts in child-rearing.

INTRODUCTION

Parental Choice as a Policy Issue:

In an era in which governmental and business leaders concerned about global economic competition have made educational improvement a high priority, parental choice of schools is perhaps the most controversial idea among the large number of reform proposals. Advocates argue that, given the opportunity, parents would choose higher quality schools. They view choice as providing incentives for schools to improve by forcing them to compete for students. Critics contend that choice will create problems of equity and may ultimately undermine our system of public education. While several states and a significant number of local school districts have adopted parental choice plans which are usually limited (except for post-secondary options) to public schools, the effects of such plans remain hotly contested.

While the concept of choice in education can be traced back to the 18th and 19th centuries, the contemporary debate was begun by conservative free market economist Milton Freidman. In his book Capitalism and Freedom, (1962), Friedman outlined the case for a system of educational vouchers. He argued that vouchers would reduce the cost of education while improving its quality by replacing an unresponsive public monopoly with a competitive system in

which schools would have to offer a quality education or risk the loss of students and funds. The idea was subsequently adopted in modified form by liberal groups and individuals seeking to provide greater options for poor families, most notably the Center for the Study of Public Policy (1970) and John Coons and Stephen Sugarman (1978).

The Nixon administration was the first to introduce educational policy initiatives based on the concept of parental choice. Under Nixon, the Office of Economic Opportunity and its successor agencies sponsored a five-year demonstration project in California (Bridge and Blackman, 1978; Weiler, 1974) and sought unsuccessfully to promote similar projects in New Hampshire (Donaldson, 1977) and elsewhere. The idea was revived by President Reagan, who proposed legislation to offer tuition tax credits to parents with children in private schools (Catterall, 1983) and to convert the Chapter 1 program into a compensatory voucher program (Pear, 1985). Both bills failed in Congress.

President Bush has sought to defuse opposition by withholding support for Federal aid to parents of private school students and by focusing the attention on parental choices among public schools. This shift in emphasis was clearly in evidence when the torch on this issue was passed from Reagan to Bush at a White House Workshop on Choice in Education on January 10, 1989 (Paulu, 1989). Bush subsequently ruled out tuition aid on budgetary grounds (Bradley, 1989), while continuing to push for choice at the

education summit (Text of Final Summit Statement, 1989) and elsewhere.

While conservative and liberal advocates of parental choice differ in a number of their assumptions most notably with respect to equity concerns and the role of government in regulating choice, they agree on the fundamental assumption that giving parents the option to choose will result in improving the quality of education.

Review of Research:

Relatively little svstematic research has been conducted on parental choice, and the published research that exists is hardly conclusive (Maddaus, 1990). The belief that parental choice will promote school improvement, most specifically with respect to academic achievement as measured by standardized tests, is based on the assumption that parents value such achievement and have the information and skills needed to evaluate different schools on that basis. But it has not yet been established that this assumption is true for most parents, and especially for those parents whose children currently attend the lowest achieving schools.

The two largest and most thorough studies of parental choice in the 1980's (Williams, Hancher and Hutner, 1983; Darling-Hammond and Kirby, 1985) both found that academic

quality is the most important consideration for parents making decisions at the time of enrollment. Using a nationwide sample of parents, Williams et.al. found that public school parents who considered other schools at the time of enrollment cited "academic standards/courses" as the most important factor in their decisions in 32.6% of cases, with "teachers" accounting for another 14.3%, whereas "finances" accounted for only 19.5%, and "transportation/convenience" for only 15.0%. Darling-Hammond and Kirby asked the identical question of a diverse sample of parents in the Minneapolis-St. Paul Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area. The most frequent responses they received were: "quality of school/education/program" (59.8%), "financial factors" (11.5%), "convenience/proximity of school" (5.8%) and "family factors" (5.7%).

These findings must be interpreted, however, taking into consideration that only 19.7% of public school parents in the Williams study, and 25.7% in the Darling-Hammond study, considered other schools at the time of current enrollment. Nor does including private school parents (about 10% of the total population) substantially alter the picture. While Williams et.al. appear to have assumed that enrolling a child in private school represented a conscious choice, Darling-Hammond and Kirby report that only 34.3% of private school parents said they considered other schools at the time of enrollment.

Far larger proportions -- 52.7% in the Williams study and 53.1% in the Darling-Hammond study -- said they

considered public schools in making decisions about residence. And Williams et.al. add that "for 18% it (i.e. the public school their children would attend) was the most important factor in their choice." (p. 18) But neither study delves into what public school characteristics were considered at the time of residential choice. Darling-Hammond and Kirby refer to "school quality" in connection with residential choice, but do not separate out this category of parents when reporting most important reasons for current school choice.

Although some parents at all income and educational levels reported making choices of schools, both studies found that better educated, more affluent public school parents were more likely to have chosen schools (whether through residential decisions or at time of enrollment or both) than less educated, less affluent parents. The Williams study reports a greater percentage differential between highest and lowest groups based on income, whereas the Darling-Hammond study reports a greater differential based on parents', especially mothers', education. But regardless of which factor is more important, such differentials raise questions about the effects of choice on educational equity.

The question of equity is further highlighted by most extensive research study of public school choice in the decade of the 1970's. Beginning in 1972, the Rand Corporation conducted an exhaustive study of the "public school voucher demonstration" in the Alum Rock Unified

School District of San Jose, California. The Alum Rock district is inhabited primarily by Mexican-Americans (55%), with an additional 10% of the residents being black. It is also one of the poorest districts in California. Certain elementary and middle schools in the district were designated as "voucher" schools, and parents living in the attendance areas of these schools were given choices among "mini-school" programs in these schools (Weiler, 1974). Rand researchers Bridge and Blackman (1978) found that "location" was by far the most important consideration in school enrollment for these Alum Rock parents. When asked why they enrolled their children in the schools that they did, 70.9% of these parents mentioned "location" as a factor. In addition, responses from 30.8% of the families were categorized as dealing with "family and friendship ties", which in many cases would also be related to location. Program features were cited by only 32.0% of respondents, while general school characteristics were mentioned by 18.9% of those questioned, and 18.0% made references to principals and teachers.

In their summary of these findings, Bridge and Blackman describe "location" as a "simplistic and educationally irrelevant" consideration. And they add (in a footnote) that, "no theory of learning that we know of would say that the school location per se has an impact on learning." (p. 45) In a separate article on post-secondary education entitlement programs, Bridge (1978) asked, with reference to

prospective voucher holders, "will they invest in education that improves their economic leverage in the labor market, or will they buy the educational equivalents of junk food, easy to consume but lacking in substance?" (p. 511) Largely on the basis of evidence from Alum Rock, Bridge argued that low income, less educated individuals "are least likely to seek and process the information they need to make intelligent choices." (p. 512) Lacking such information, "they will make choices on educationally irrelevant grounds (e.g. emotional responses to hucksters' advertising)." (p. 512) Bridge concluded that educational entitlement programs "should not be implemented until effective policies to overcome information imperfections have been developed in experimental programs." (p. 523)

One could argue, conceivably, that Bridge's concerns regarding "information imperfections", based on the Alum Rock data, are not generalizable to the population of the United States as a whole. But if poor and minority parents such as those in Alum Rock are indeed more likely to make decisions based on "educationally irrelevant grounds" such as location than other parents, then equity becomes a major problem. Bush (Paulu, 1989, p. 32) has argued that parental choice would benefit poor and minority children most because it is they who "are most likely to be burdened by inadequate public education." But such students would benefit only if their parents would make "good" decisions on their behalf (i.e. choose schools offering the best quality education).

Most of the remainder of this paper will be devoted to the author's research on how and why parents enroll their children in the schools that they do in five neighborhoods in Syracuse, New York (Maddaus, 1987, 1988a,b,c, 1989). I will seek to demonstrate that "location" (or more precisely, the characteristics of neighborhoods and neighborhood schools) plays an important part in the child-rearing strategies of parents at all educational and income levels. If one adopts, as most parents implicitly do, a wholistic view of child development focusing on social, emotional and moral as well as cognitive growth, then considerations related to "location" are indeed "educationally relevant". This analysis will also seek to demonstrate why twice as many parents report considering schools in residential choice as consider other schools at the time of enrollment. In the conclusion of this paper, I will reflect on the limitations of the economic model of parental choice and the contributions to an understanding of choice that can be gained from looking at other models (sociological, ecological and feminist) in which "location" is a significant factor. And finally, I will reflect on one effort (Grant, 1988) to involve school-staff in a program focusing on moral development.

THE SYRACUSE NEIGHBORHOOD STUDY OF PARENTAL CHOICE

Design:

This research was conducted in the city of Syracuse, New York, a medium-sized city with a population of about

4160,000, approximately 20% of which was minority (16% black). Due to demographic patterns and other factors, approximately a third of the students in public schools are black. Syracuse has a diversified economy and thus a wide range of occupations and income levels. Neighborhoods are readily identifiable by race and social status, and some are clearly identified by residents with particular white ethnic groups (Irish, Italian, Polish, etc.) as well. A majority of the city's white residents are Catholic, and the city had fourteen Catholic schools at the time field work for this study was conducted, four of which enrolled mostly black Protestants. While neighborhood housing patterns remain segregated by race, the city's public schools were successfully desegregated in the 1970's through a combination of magnet schools, voluntary busing, school closings and construction, and redrawing of attendance area boundaries. At the time of this study, approximately 50% of elementary school aged children attended neighborhood public schools, another 30% attended other public schools in the city, and about 20% attended private (mostly Catholic) schools.

Bronfenbrenner (1979) has theorized that "ecological niches" provide significant contexts for childhood growth and development. Based on this theory, Bronfenbrenner and his colleagues at Cornell University conducted research in Syracuse which has demonstrated that neighborhood-based social networks have an impact on school performance (Cochran and Henderson, 1985). Based on this

earlier work, this study was organized with neighborhoods as basic data collection and analysis units. Furthermore, given the importance of socio-economic status in prior research on parental choice, the neighborhoods chosen spanned a range from low income to upper middle income. (NOTE: An effort was made to include black as well as white families, but for various reasons this proved difficult. The data reported here are based on data from white families only. I would encourage others to pursue a related study involving black families.)

In addition to socio-economic status, selection of neighborhoods was based on the following criteria: (1) each neighborhood was within the attendance area boundaries of a single public school; (2) each neighborhood was relatively homogeneous; (3) neighborhoods were located within one section of the city; (4) apparent physical and social boundaries were used in identifying neighborhoods; and (5) neighborhood size was limited to no more than 50 families with elementary school aged children.

Once neighborhoods were identified, the following procedures were followed:

(i) A door-to-door survey was conducted in May, June and July in each neighborhood to identify elementary school aged children and their current/previous year's school (if applicable) as well as their school for the coming year.

(ii) Interviews were sought with parents who had transferred or were considering transferring their children from one school to another or who had considered (however briefly) two or more schools for Kindergarten enrollment.

(iii) Parents who agreed to be interviewed before schools reopened were asked to describe their thoughts and actions regarding school enrollment for each child beginning with Kindergarten entry and continuing up to the time of the interview, to comment on various school enrollment procedures, and to provide family background data.

(iv) Two to four months after school reopened, follow-up interviews were conducted in which parents were asked to comment on what had happened since the first interview, on their satisfaction with their children's schools and on several specific issues identified in preliminary analysis of the data from the first interviews.

(v) Detailed memoes were written on each set of interviews for each family to identify possible generalizations.

(vi) Generalizations were then organized by topic, possible confirming and disconfirming cases were identified and analyzed, and generalizations were revised accordingly.

In all, 227 elementary school aged children from 161 families were identified in these five neighborhoods. Interviews were requested with 54 families and completed with 39.

Characteristics of the Neighborhoods:

The five predominantly white neighborhoods chosen for this study were not clearly identified with particular white ethnic groups. Nonetheless, in about three-quarters of the families interviewed one or both parents were Catholics whose grandparents or great-grandparents had come to the United States from Italy, Ireland, Poland and/or Germany.

These five neighborhoods represent a wide range of income levels within a relatively compact geographical area. Less than two miles separates the two neighborhoods farthest removed from each other.

"Canal Town", so named because it is located close to the former route of the Erie Canal, is one of the oldest sections of Syracuse. Some of the better homes in this area have been the targets of gentrification, but the new urban gentry are mostly childless and uninvolved with area schools. Most of the families with children in this area are low income (under $15,000), and the parents have not gone beyond high school. They are renters, and are residentially mobile, though many of the moves are within the same neighborhood. Houses are small and frequently in need of major repair. Yards are small and frequently unkept. Most of the parents would rather live elsewhere, but cannot afford better housing. Control over their children is a major concern of parents. Those who consented to be interviewed, by their own accounts, were more successful in managing their children than were many of their neighbors.

"Parkside" is a small enclave surrounded on two sides by Canal Town, on a third side by a city park and on a fourth side by a commercial area. As one rounds the corner from Canal Town into Parkside, the scene changes abruptly. Parkside houses are larger and better maintained, and most have quite large yards and even gardens. Families here are home-owners, with incomes ranging from $15,000 to $40,000. Most parents have some post-secondary education. They describe Parkside as a good neighborhood, with neighbors you can count on in times of need.

Up the hill beyond the park is "Hilltop", a neighborhood similar in appearance and social composition to Parkside. Hilltop's primary characteristic is its proximity to "The Village" (see below). Hilltop residents look in that direction for shopping, community activities and schools, despite the fact that the former city boundary remains a social boundary separating the two neighborhoods. Hilltop residents view their neighborhood as safe, secure and closeknit, a good place for raising children.

"The Village" was a separate, incorporated village until the 1920's, and still retains its distinct identity centered around its own "Main Street" with a diversity of small businesses. Homes are larger and have larger yards than in Hilltop. Family incomes range from $20,000 to $50,000 and up. Most parents have attended college, and a substantial percentage have bachelor's degrees. The Village is regarded as a very family oriented neighborhood, with many community activities for children.

"The Acres" was a farm during much of the 19th century. Later, it became the home of the city's Protestant elite. In recent years, many successful Catholic families have moved into this neighborhood as the former residents have moved to the more affluent suburbs. The houses are among the largest in the city, some of them including what were once servants' quarters on the third floor. Lawns are as large as those in many suburbs. Family incomes are $50,000 and up. Most parents have bachelor's degrees, and some have advanced degrees in the professions. There are fewer community activities than in The Village, and privacy is highly valued by many residents.

Eisenhower Elementary School, located in Canal Town, serves a large attendance area which also includes Parkside and Hilltop. Hoover Elementary School serves The Village, while Truman Elementary is located in The Acres. In addition, there are three Catholic schools in or very near these neighborhoods. Finally, there is a private school located at the edge of The Acres and within a mile of all other study neighborhoods, and a Kindergarten program at a day care center in The Village. (See Figure 1 for a schematic map of these neighborhoods, their public school attendance areas and public and private schools.)

Findings:

The neighborhood surveys yielded important information about variations in elementary school enrollment patterns from one neighborhood to the next (see Table 1).

TABLE 1

Elementary School Enrollment
by Neighborhood, School Location and School Type

Neighborhoods	Canal Town	Parkside	Hilltop	The Village	The Acres
Neighborhood Income Level	low	lower middle	lower middle	middle	upper middle
Public School Attendance Area	------	Eisenhower	------	Hoover	Truman
No. of Children Identified	71	19	50	38	49
SCHOOL ENROLLMENT:					
Neighborhood Schools					
- public	63 %	5 %	8 %	63 %	63 %
- Catholic	4 %	42 %	16 %	13 %	0 %
- other private	0 %	0 %	0 %	3 %	4 %
Subtotal	67 %	47 %	24 %	79 %	67 %
Schools in Other Study Neighborhoods					
- public	3 %	16 %	34 %	3 %	0 %
- Catholic	4 %	0 %	26 %	3 %	0 %
- other private	0 %	5 %	0 %	3 %	0 %
Subtotal	7 %	21 %	60 %	9 %	0 %
Schools in Neighborhoods Not in Study					
- public	23 %	21 %	8 %	3 %	6 %
- Catholic	1 %	5 %	8 %	10 %	16 %
- other private	1 %	5 %	0 %	0 %	10 %
Subtotal	25 %	31 %	16 %	13 %	32 %
TOTAL *	99 %	99 %	100 %	101 %	99 %

* May not equal 100% due to rounding off.

As indicated in Table 1, there are striking differences in enrollment patterns from neighborhood to neighborhood, even though these neighborhoods were all within two miles of each other. The poorest neighborhood (Canal Town) and the two most prosperous neighborhoods (The Village and The Acres) each enrolled 63% of their elementary school children in neighborhood public schools. But most of the remaining Canal Town children went to public schools in non-study neighborhoods, while their counterparts in The Village and The Acres went to private schools. Parkside and Hilltop have sharply differing enrollment patterns from the other three neighborhoods, in that less than 10% of children in these two neighborhoods attend the neighborhood public school. The largest proportion of Parkside children attend a neighborhood Catholic school, while a majority of Hilltop children attend either public or Catholic schools in The Village.

But despite the diversity in neighborhoods and neighborhood enrollment patterns revealed in this study, most of the parents interviewed shared a common perspective with respect to child-rearing and its relationship to choice of school. This was most clearly articulated by two single mothers with middle class aspirations who nonetheless live in Canal Town. In the words of one of these mothers,

> "I think part of a parent's responsibility is to get their kids on the right road. And the right road, to me, means getting a good education and a job, and being a responsible

> member of society... I'm not with [my daughter] from eight to two, and I want my values at home to be reenforced by the school and the teacher and the other children."

Like most other parents interviewed, this parent identified the acquisition of moral values, including respect for adults in authority, respect for peers, respect for private and public property, and hard work, as an essential part of preparation for responsible adult life. These parents tried to teach these values at home, but they realized that their children were also influenced by both children and adults in the neighborhood and at school. They saw it as their duty to manage their children's lives so that they would grow up adhering to the values they viewed as necessary. Another mother explained,

> "Everything he does I try to check out ahead of time. Scouts. Football. Baseball. I go to all his games. They help him in growing up. They build his character."

This concern regarding participation in formal organizations is also reflected in many parents' watchful eyes with respect to the informal neighborhood playgroups in which their children participate. And it is reflected in a concern about the moral and social qualities of schools.

Schools, however, present a unique set of problems for parents concerned with their children's well-being, because of the compulsory nature of education in our society. Most

of the parents interviewed adopted one of four strategies with respect to school enrollment:

(i) Living in a "good" neighborhood with a "good" school: This was the preferred strategy for virtually all parents. Parents living in The Village and The Acres believed that they had been able to choose a home in a "good" neighborhood, and were generally pleased by the neighborhood schools available to them. Those in Parkside and Hilltop liked their neighborhoods, but many wished that the public school attendance area boundaries had been drawn so as to give them access to good schools as well. And most of the parents in Canal Town were dissatisfied with their neighborhood and would have preferred to live elsewhere, while giving their neighborhood public school mixed reviews.

Most parents in The Village and The Acres talked about the virtues of neighborhood schools: children walking to school with the children they played with after school, close contacts between parents and school staff, the use of school buildings for a variety of neighborhood programs outside school hours, and so on. Implicitly, these parents believed that their neighborhood schools (both public and Catholic) reflected the values shared by most parents in the neighborhood. They trusted their schools. One father in The Village, interviewed just before he and his wife and two children moved to New York City, summed it up by saying,

> "Certain kinds of community foster certain kinds of school. The better the socio-economic conditions of an area, the better the schools."

Such assumptions, usually tacit, also became explicit in cases in which parents purchased homes in what they perceived to be good neighborhoods, believing they would have access to good schools as well, only to discover after they had moved into their new home that they were on the "wrong" side of a school attendance area boundary. Their anger and frustration was compounded if the school they preferred was actually closer to their home than the school to which their children were assigned, as was the case for families living in Hilltop. One Hilltop mother summed up the feelings of many of her neighbors when she described the situation she and her husband faced:

> "Where you live is the type of area you want. We knew about both Hoover [in The Village] and Eisenhower [in Canal Town] when we moved here. But we thought the children went to the school you lived near. And we were so close to Hoover, just three blocks away. We knew we wouldn't send them to Eisenhower. We didn't like the neighborhood. It's sort of an inner-city, low socio-economic neighborhood. We were concerned about our children's safety. We never thought of boundary lines. We were naive. We'll never make that mistake again."

Those parents who did live in good neighborhoods with good schools were at a loss to explain why any parent would willingly bus their children to a non-neighborhood public

school. One mother, a resident of The Village and a teacher at Polk (located in a predominantly low income white neighborhood in another part of the city) commented:

> "There are a lot of children bused in from Wilson [an elementary school in a black neighborhood] at Polk. It's for integration. I don't object. But it's not their community. We don't see their parents. It wasn't their fault. Transportation is hard to get. I spoke with some of them by phone. I don't know why they made the choice to send their children to Polk. With our neighborhood school, the community is involved. [Now that my child has entered Hoover] I intend to be involved."

This mother failed to appreciate that while community involvement is a well established tradition in The Village, it is less frequently found in low income neighborhoods -- whether white or black -- that surround schools such as Eisenhower and Wilson. Quite the contrary, those parents in such neighborhoods who take their parenting responsibilities seriously tend to view their neighborhoods as hazardous to their children's welfare, and tend to be socially isolated from other parents who feel the same way. And the staff of such schools are perceived as struggling, often with limited success, against the negative behaviors displayed in school by a significant proportion of neighborhood children.

(ii) Selecting a neighborhood Catholic school: For those parents who perceive that their neighborhood public school has failed to uphold the standards they see as important, enrollment in a Catholic school is often viewed as a viable alternative. Among white parents, Catholic schools are viewed as an acceptable alternative for their children only by those parents who are themselves Catholic (although there is much evidence that black Protestants also view Catholic schools as acceptable). Catholic schools are perceived to be better able to maintain control over students' behavior in school, and to promote values consistent with good behavior outside school as well. A Parkside mother who sent her children to the near-by Catholic school (St. Maura's) rather than to Eisenhower explained:

> "I know a lot of kids transfer to St. Maura's who have been beaten up at Eisenhower. It's a tough school. I didn't want them in that atmosphere. In this immediate neighborhood -- this street -- all the children went to St. Maura's, and we wanted our kids to walk with the others so they would be safe. [We also heard that St. Maura's had] small classes and discipline. We're pretty strict. We like the discipline. [And it's] close knit. We like the fact that we're on a first-name basis with the teachers. If there's a problem, they come right to you."

Several Catholic parents in Canal Town also expressed a preference for St. Maura's, although very few families in that neighborhood sent their children there. One mother, herself a graduate of a Catholic grammar school, commented:

> "I knew I could never afford to send my child to a Catholic school, so I didn't look into it. You'd have to buy books and uniforms and pay tuition. So when you add it all up, it's almost a thousand dollars... If I had the money or someone would pay for it, I would send Billy to a Catholic school. I think they learn more in Catholic schools. They're more strict with them, because that's the way nuns are."

Money was a major obstacle for most Canal Town parents, or they would not be living in that neighborhood. One of the few mothers in Canal Town who did enroll her child at St. Maura's had to go back to work shortly thereafter, despite receiving some assistance from the diocesan tuition assistance program. Caught between increasing costs and declining enrollment, St. Maura's closed the year after field work for this study was completed.

(iii) Selecting a school in another neighborhood: For non-Catholics, and for those Catholics who had no neighborhood Catholic schools, an unacceptable neighborhood public school spurred the search for other alternatives. For parents in Hilltop, the close proximity of The Village made its schools the natural place to turn. But rising costs and

declining enrollments were problems for most Catholic schools in Syracuse in the 1980's. St Dorothy's, in The Village, felt the pinch too. Lacking tax revenues, it was unable to match program improvements which the city was instituting at Hoover. And since Hoover was also perceived to reflect community values, St. Dorothy's experienced difficulty holding onto the Village's families based on its claim of stricter discipline. As parents in The Village transferred their children from St. Dorothy's to Hoover, overcrowding became a problem at Hoover. In previous years, Hilltop parents were able to transfer their children to Hoover, and those children whose older siblings already attended Hoover were still admitted at the time of this study. But other parents from Hilltop found that the doors at Hoover were now closed to white transfers (black children were still admitted to meet racial balance guidelines adopted several years earlier, another source of overcrowding at Hoover).

The same program that allowed black children into Hoover also provided options for white children in schools that were, or were in danger of becoming, racially imbalanced black. In practice, this meant any school with a black enrollment in excess of the district average (about 30%. The Hilltop family whose surprise about attendance area boundary lines was quoted above initially sent their children to St. Dorothy's for its "environment". But these parents subsequently became concerned about "academics" as well, and resumed their search. The father describes the

decision he and his wife reached to send their children to a school in the city's largest middle income black neighborhood, a school which also serves an affluent white neighborhood with many professional families:

> "Van Buren was open. It has very high academic standards, and the school atmosphere is also very good. The environment is more middle class. It's got a mixed group of children, but the youngsters are more academically oriented. They have the same values we do."

But when asked whether they would send their children to junior high and high school in that section of the city or send them to high school close to their home, these parents indicated that they had not even thought of the former possibility. They simply assumed that their children would go to the high school nearest home.

Social class also seemed to be an underlying, though rarely articulated, factor in the choices of low income parents who sent their children to public schools outside the study area. These were the only children in the study neighborhoods who attended the two magnet schools in the city's largest black section. The mother who closely supervised her son's participation in scouting and athletics gave the following explanation of how she enrolled him in a magnet school:

> "I called up the Board of Education and said, 'I want him out of that zoo. Where else can I

send him?' They said, 'There's a different principal there this year. Things will be different.' I said, 'They'll be the same again in two months. It's zooey. I want him out.' They said, 'OK. You can send him to either Monroe or Kennedy. They're both magnet schools.' So I went down to Monroe and I went around to all the fourth grade clasrooms, and I picked out Mr. Smith."

The only children identified in this study from The Village and The Acres who attended public schools outside these neighborhoods were three students with handicapping conditions and one in joint custody of divorced parents. The Acres has no Catholic church of its own, much less a Catholic school, and several children attended Catholic schools in other city neighborhoods and across the city line in a near-by suburb. This was possible in part because the city is required by state law to transport children to private schools within 15 miles of their homes.

This private school transportation law is also partially responsible for the success of a fundamentalist Christian school on the opposite side of the city. Three children from fundamentalist families in The Acres take the bus across the city to attend this school. The mother of one of these children explained:

> "There's a lot of behavior that's tolerated at public school that would not be tolerated at Christian Life School. There's no question of leaving things up to the conscience of the teacher. I did teach for a time. At that point in my life, I was very humanistic. Until I developed a relationship with the Lord. There are situations that could occur at public schools which would just be impossible at Christian Life. [Before we converted,] we worked hard to move into a neighborhood with professional people. We had certain expectations about them. But it's no different here than anywhere else. You see a difference in people who line up with the word of God. The world goes it's own way. But we have consistency between home, school and church."

This family shared with many others the idea of managing the lives of their children so as to ensure that they grew up in an acceptable moral environment. They even tried, at one point, to make neighborhood choice a part of that strategy. But the neighborhood failed to meet their expectations, and now they seek consistency in other settings, not the least of which is a school on the opposite side of the city.

(iv) Fighting it out in the neighborhood public school: Not all parents in the Eisenhower attendance area think that

Eisenhower is a "bad" school. Of those parents whose children had actually attended the school at some point, past or present, there were a significant number of positive comments, especially with respect to encouragement their children had received from particular teachers.

But there were also numerous negative comments, most frequently on the subject of discipline. For example, one Canal Town mother, who was trying to decide whether to transfer her children to a magnet school, commented:

> "The kids have too much freedom. They run and kick and fight and yell. When I was in school, there was no way you could get away with that. But here, no one says anything about it, unless they get caught by the principal or somebody."

To be sure, this same mother describes neighborhood children, including older ones in secondary schools, behaving in much worse ways while out in streets of the neighborhood. This mother believes that school staff (apparently trying to deal with inappropriate behavior) at times behave inappropriately themselves, at least with respect to her own children. Her tactics seem to further compound the problems by signalling distrust of the staff. For example, she described a confrontation she had with a lunchroom aide who kicked her son, and tells about going into school to find out who is telling the truth, the teachers or her children. A high school dropout herself,

this mother is very concerned about her children's progress (or, more precisely, lack of it) and tries to be involved, but appears able to do little that is truly helpful.

Only one Parkside mother identified in this study had sent her child to Eisenhower in the year preceding the interviews. In contrast to the Canal Town mother quoted above, this Parkside mother had developed much more effective coping skills. Herself a teacher in the city school system, this mother has established frequent and regular communications with her son's teachers, and seemed satisfied with his progress. She was reluctant to criticize Eisenhower in any way, having decided to live in this neighborhood and send her children to this school (as well as to teach in a city school) because of the social diversity that she perceives to have been lacking in her own school experiences:

> "When I was younger you not only went to a school that was homogeneous, but also you were put in a group going from class to class, and there wasn't much contact even with other kids in the same school. In a way, I felt betrayed that no one had ever told me I would have to deal with anyone who was different. I was so upset that my parents seemed shocked when I got involved with anyone who was different in college. I want my kids to be able to deal with anything that comes down the pike."

When asked in the follow-up interviews how they felt about shared values and social diversity in schools, most parents indicated some degree of openness to diversity as long as there was some agreement on basic values. This parent was the only one in the thirty-nine families interviewed for this study who clearly articulated a preference for diversity, even if it meant accepting some differences in values, and had clearly acted on the basis of that preference. She could easily have chosen to live, to teach and to send her child to school somewhere else. But she was willing to make decisions that her neighbors found incomprehensible, confident that with her support her child would benefit from the experience of attending Eisenhower.

CONCLUSION

For most of the parents in this study, the overriding factor in choice of school was not cognitive learning but moral values. Even the one mother who most clearly dissents from the prevailing view of parental responsibility, preferring cultural diversity in a low income school over consistency of moral values, has taken a position based on the primacy of moral education.

Perhaps this finding can be explained by noting the widespread perception that cognitive instruction differed little among public schools in the city. For academics to be of primary concern, there must be academic differences. But parents perceived significant differences in academics only

when comparing public and private schools. It must be noted that these parents discussed academics in terms of input (curriculum, teachers, etc.) rather than academic outcomes, which varied substantially among schools. But this variation in outcomes, parents suggested, was a reflection of moral environments in which the instruction was delivered.

Furthermore, in a city in which there are significant socio-economic and cultural differences from neighborhood to neighborhood, the moral environment of a school depends greatly on the neighborhood in which a school is located. The moral impact of that school environment depends in large measure on its interaction with other moral environments in which children spend their time. LOCATION DOES MATTER. Location is perceived to have significant impact on outcomes that parents value. Education is not like groceries or other consumer goods, Friedman's (1973) assertion to the contrary notwithstanding. Nor is location educationally irrelevant, as Bridge asserted after analyzing the data from Alum Rock.

The idea that communities could be important in parental choice of school is not without its support in social science theory. Sociological (Nesbit, 1966), ecological (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and feminist (Gilligan, 1982) theorists have all pointed to the importance of communities for moral development. Green (1988) has summarized the point concisely by observing that "moral education is best conducted in a world in which both the

costs of virtue and the benefits of evil are slight.... moral education is unlikely to succeed except in a morally good community." (pp. 132-133) While the parents interviewed in this study did not make their case so succinctly, they understood Green's assertion intuitively and frequently acted on that basis.

If this study is any indication, what parents most want from schools is that they promote the moral development of their children by re-enforcing such development in homes, neighborhoods (where possible) and (for some) places of worship. Assuming for the moment that we may accept this preference as legitimate, what then would be the implications for public policy? Clearly, it is not enough to say that public policy should support greater diversity in schools. In the moral domain, at least, it is far from clear that parents want greater diversity. What they do want, it appears, is assured access for their children to morally good schools. Furthermore, it appears that, at least in general terms, the possibility of a concensus exists regarding what a morally good school is. A morally good school promotes respect for other people (both other students and adults, especially those in authority) and their property, and encourages hard work and responsible, productive, contributing activity. All else is secondary.

The issue, then, is what kinds of public policies would support increased access to morally good schools. Coleman, Hoffer and Kilgore (1982) have suggested that private

(especially Catholic) schools are superior to public schools in promoting both appropriate behavior and academic achievement. But this study suggests that this is primarily true in neighborhoods in which substantial numbers of adults are uninterested or ineffective in maintaining behavior standards, and that there is relatively little perceived difference, morally speaking, between public and Catholic schools in good neighborhoods. Hence, increasing opportunities for enrollment in Catholic schools across all neighborhoods is a rather inefficient way to improve moral education in schooling.

Grant (1981) has suggested that our society has three options in addressing what he and Coleman et.al. both view as a "collapse of adult authority". The first option is the one implied by Coleman: withdraw children from public schools and place them in private schools with a shared conception of morality. The second is "to seek some new basis of establishing a provisional morality within the public schools, which raises the question of how we regenerate a dialogue about moral education in an increasingly technicist society." (p. 147) The third option is to let the legal-rational model run its course until we replace schools with contract-learning systems.

Concluding that the second of these options should be preferred, Grant (1988) proceeded to test that alternative in a school he calls Hamilton High. He studied the waves of change that have swept through that school since its opening

in the early 1950's, and presented his findings to a 12-member committee consisting of the school's principal, several teachers and other staff. Together, they discussed the meaning of the changes Grant had uncovered in his historical account, changes that had effected most urban high schools during this period. They participated in a dialogue about the intellectual and moral aims of a public school in a democratic society. And they created and put into operation a new participative decision-making structure for the school.

Would replicating such a process in the neighborhood schools where this study was conducted be sufficient to address the moral concerns of the parents I interviewed? Perhaps. But the problems of Eisenhower school will not yield easily to such a solution. The school staff by themselves cannot do much to change conditions in the neighborhood in which the school is located. Nor is it clear that parents would be satisfied with a process and a conclusion in which they themselves had no voice. The process of dialogue may be an important one, but limiting it to the school staff may frustrate its potential. Empowerment of teachers may be a necessary but not sufficient condition for the moral regeneration of schools.

If schools are permitted to compete with each other for students, and if successful implementation of the process conducted by Grant and his collaborators at Hamilton High is a necessary condition for success in student recruitment,

then Eisenhower may still be at a disadvantage. Empowerment of individual parents, along the lines pioneered by Milton Friedman, will not help most children, especially children of the poor. Nor is empowerment of teachers and other school staff sufficient, though that may be helpful. What we need in addition, I suspect, is what the War on Poverty of the 1960's sought but only rarely achieved: empowerment of communities, most particularly, in this instance, of parents, teachers and others willing to take collaborative responsibility for child-rearing.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bradley, A. (1989, April 5). Tax credits are too expensive, Bush asserts. Education Week, pp. 1, 17.

Bridge, R.G. (1978, May). Information imperfections: The Achilles' heel of entitlement plans. School Review, 86(3), 504-529.

Bridge, R.G. and Blackman, J. (1978, April). A study of alternatives in American education, Vol. IV: Family choice in schooling (Report R-2170/4-NIE). Santa Monica, CA: Rand.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). The ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Catterall, J.S. (1983). Tuition tax credits: Fact and fiction. Bloomington, IN: Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation.

Center for the Study of Public Policy (1970, December). Education vouchers: A report on financing elementary education grants to parents (OEO grant CG8542). Cambridge, MA: Author.

Cochran, M. and Henderson, C.R.Jr. (1985, February). Family matters: Evaluation of the parental empowerment program (NIE contract no. 400-76-0150). Ithaca, NY: Cornell University.

Coleman, J.S., Hoffer, T., and Kilgore, S. (1982). High school achievement: Public, Catholic, and private schools compared. New Yor, NY: Basic Books.

Coons, J.E. and Sugarman, S.D. (1978). Education by choice: The case for family control. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Darling-Hammond, L. and Kirby, S.N. (1985, December). Tuition tax deductions and parental school choice: A case study of Minnesota (Report no. R-3294-NIE). Santa Monica, CA: Rand.

Donaldson, G. (1977, March). Education vouchers in New Hampshire: An attempt at free market educational reform (NIE contract no. B2C-5331). Newton, MA: C.M. Leinwand Associates.

Friedman, M. (1962). Capitalism and Freedom. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Friedman, M. (1973, September 23). The voucher idea: Selling schooling like groceries. The New York Times Magazine. pp. 22-23, 65, 67, 69-72.

Gilligan, C. (1982). In a different voice: Psychological theory and women's development. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Grant, G. (1981, Summer). The character of education and the education of character. Daedalus, 110(3), 135-149.

Grant, G. (1988). The world we created at Hamilton High. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Green, T. (1988, February). The economy of virtue and the primacy of prudence. American Journal of Education, 127-142.

Maddaus, J. (1987, April). Residential mobility and school enrollment. Paper presented to the annual meeting of the New England Educational Research Organization, Stratton Mountain, VT. ERIC Document No. ED 307 680.

Maddaus, J. (1988, April). Parental choice and quality education. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the New England Educational Research Organization, Rockport, ME. ERIC Document No. ED 308 571.

Maddaus, J. (1988, September). Families, neighborhoods and schools: Parental perspectives and actions regarding choice in elementary school enrollment. Dissertation Abstracts International, 49, 477-A (University Microfilms No. 8806952).

Maddaus, J. (1988, November). Parents' perceptions of the moral environment in choosing their children's elementary schools. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Association for Moral Education, Pittsburgh, PA.

Maddaus, J. (1989, November). Parental choice and the moral environment of schools. Ethics in Education, 9(2), 7-10.

Maddaus, J. (1990). Parental choice of school: What parents think and do. Review of Research in Education, 16, 267-295.

Nesbit, R.A. (1966). The sociological tradition. New York, NY: Basic Books.

Paulu, N. (1989, October). Improving schools and empowering parents: Choice in American education. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

Pear, R. (1985, Nov. 14). Reagan prposes vouchers to give poor a choice of schools. The New York Times, p. A20.

Text of the Final Summit Statement Issued by President, Governors (1989, Oct. 4). Education Week, p. 12.

Weiler, D. (1972, June). A public school voucher demonstration: The first year at Alum Rock (Report no. R-1495-NIE). Santa Monica, CA: Rand.

Williams, M.F., Hancher, K.S. and Hutner, A. (1983, December). Parents and school choice: A household survey. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education. ERIC Document No. ED 240 739.

Figure 1

Neighborhoods, Schools

and Public School Attendance Areas